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FRENCH UNIONISM MILITANT

"So another tradition vanishes," exclaimed a witty Frenchwoman a few years ago on returning from a magnificent state festival given by M. le ministre Millerand, one-time socialist comrade. "Under the Restoration a Liberal was defined as an escaped convict. Thirty years ago it was agreed that every Republican wore dirty linen and was careless of his finger-nails. Later the Socialist took the place of the Republican. Next?"¹

The next has come. The syndicalist, exponent of the new revolutionary unionism, has displaced the socialist as chief bogey of the bourgeois world. And not of the bourgeois world alone, for the new movement is causing almost as much uneasiness to the parliamentary socialist as to the philistine. France presents today the piquant spectacle of the accredited defenders of the Marxist faith acting as a moderating force, and for their pains being labeled as reactionary.²

I

One of the most vital and perplexing problems of contemporary socialism is that of the relationship between the socialist

¹ Seilhac, *Le monde socialiste*, p. 309.

² The situation lends some plausibility to the paradoxical view of socialism as lightning-rod voiced by Jules Guesde a decade ago: "Beware, on the day that socialism disappeared, you would be given up defenseless to every form of individual reprisal and private vengeance. It is we who by pointing out to the workers a method of collective enfranchisement, based and necessarily based on common political action, it is we who, in reality, constitute the greatest life-insurance company for the magnates of industry." *Chambre des Députés*, 16 juin, 1897, cited in *Revue politique*, XIV, 395.

party and the labor union. In no two countries are the relations on the same footing. In Germany close alliance with complete autonomy prevails, the socialist party being recognized as the agent of the proletariat in the political field, and the union in the economic field. In Great Britain, after long holding aloof, the trade unions have entered politics under socialist leadership—with, however, such clogging and deadening effect on the revolutionary movement that the more militant socialists of the Hyndman and Grayson type are waging war to the knife against the alliance. In Belgium trade unions form practically an integral part of the political organization, on a par with co-operative and mutual associations. In the United States politics has traditionally been barred from the union, though the Gompers-Bryan alliance, in conjunction with the stimulus to radical action which recent court decisions have given, may foreshadow a different future.

It is in France that the most interesting situation has developed. There the new unionism, or syndicalism, though committed to the socialist ideal of collective organization of industry, not only declines to be guided by the socialist party, but refuses to co-operate on the German basis of autonomous control of separate fields. For syndicalism is sufficient unto itself. It will brook no rival in its task of freeing the proletariat from its chains, recognize no other policy but its own. Its creed, in brief, is that the working class must work out its own salvation, by its own organs, by direct and not by deputed action, and that the *syndicat*, or labor union, chief of these organs, is to be regarded not merely as an instrument for securing partial alleviations of the existing capitalist system or as a recruiting ground for socialist parties, but as itself the instrument of revolution and the cell of the future social organism.

The Confédération Générale du Travail, the organization which at present is the exponent of syndicalism, is the outcome of a long and chequered development. The growth and integration of labor unions has been a slow process in France, the classic land of small industries. The chief landmarks in the early years of the movement consist in the passing or abolition of legal

restrictions on trade-union formation and activity. From the Revolution until 1864 trade unions were under the ban of the law and participation in a strike a crime punishable by heavy penalties. In 1789 the National Assembly, in its onslaught on all forms of mediaeval privilege, abolished the trade guilds and corporations. Two years later the famous *Loi Le Chapelier* imposed penalties on persons taking part in strikes or lockouts or becoming members of trade unions, whether of masters or of men. In spite of its nominal impartiality the law clearly reveals, above and beyond the faith in the doctrine of freedom of contract, the assent of the assembly to the declaration of one of its members, Cazalès, "*La nation, c'est la bourgeoisie.*" The provisions of the Code Napoleon evidence the same bias. While by Article 414 coalition among employers was forbidden if it had for its object the "improper and unjust" reduction of wages, Article 415 forbade union on the part of workmen to "suspend, obstruct, or make more costly the operations of industry," without any saving qualifications as to the justice or injustice of the proceedings. The penalties prescribed were, in the case of employers, six days' to one month's imprisonment; in the case of workmen, one to three months' imprisonment for the rank and file, and two to five years for the ringleaders. In 1864 the government of the Second Empire, giving the sanction of law to the conditions which had arisen in spite of law, amended the penal code, legalizing unions with not more than twenty members, permitting strikes or lockouts unless accompanied by violence or intimidation, and equalizing the penalties prescribed for employers and workmen. The law of 1884 completed the unshackling, permitting the formation of unions of more than twenty members exercising "the same, similar, or allied" trades, and also concerted action by unions of different trades.

The way was clear for the open organization of unions and especially for federation. The socialist parties were quick to seize the opportunity. Each of the warring factions into which French socialism was divided was long in generals and colonels, but short in rank and file: the trade unions seemed to promise an excellent recruiting ground. The Guesdists, strong in the

possession of the true Marxian faith, martially disciplined, ably led; the Broussists, urging communal autonomy and communal public ownership; the Allemanists, formed somewhat later by secession from the Broussists, opposing both Guesdist dogmatism and Broussist opportunism, advocating the general strike and aggressive union action; the Blanquists, living on the memories of the Commune, still faithful to the old theory of a catastrophic revolution—each of these parties sought in the next few years to organize the forces of labor and rally them to its flag.

The Guesdists were first in the field. Their vigorous propaganda, and particularly their policy of penetration within the unions, gave them a considerable following in the industrial north, and in a labor congress held at Lyons in 1886 they succeeded in organizing a National Federation of Trade Unions. The federation was kept in strict subordination to the party. It never manifested much independent vitality, and after nine years' flickering existence it passed away. The secondary rôle, which the Guesdists have throughout accorded to union action, is sufficiently revealed in the official recommendation to the members of the party to join a union—in order “to spread the doctrine of socialism and recruit adherents for the programme and policy of the party.”³

With their chief rival thus backed by the National Federation, the Broussists looked elsewhere for the voting support and moral backing they desired. The founding of the Paris Labor Exchange in 1886 gave them their opportunity. This institution, destined to play an important part in the French labor movement, had been advocated by leading publicists, among them the economist Molinari, at intervals during the greater part of the century. It was desired to provide a permanent meeting-place for the city's workers, to serve as a center of labor activity and education, and aid in co-ordinating the supply and demand of labor. Its scope was thus defined by M. Mesureur, president of the municipal council of Paris, in the report which led the council to set up the first exchange:

Without abandoning the platform of liberty of contract, it is your right, nay, your duty, to provide the workers means for contending with

³ *Compte-rendu du congrès national du parti ouvrier français de Lille, 1890.*

capital on an equal and legal basis. . . . With common halls freely and permanently at their disposal, the workers will be able to discuss more maturely and more exactly the many questions which concern their trade and affect their wages; they will have, for their aid and enlightenment, every faculty for obtaining information and carrying on correspondence, the data provided by statistics, an economic, industrial, and commercial library, and information as to the course of production in each industry, not only in France, but throughout the world.⁴

With a central meeting-hall and an annual subvention of 20,000 francs provided by the municipality, the Paris Labor Exchange at once became an important factor in the union movement. Other cities soon followed the example set by Paris; by 1892 the exchanges numbered fourteen, by 1895 thirty-four, and by 1898 fifty-one. By the latter year they had secured the affiliation of over 70 per cent. of French unionists. The activities of the exchange, meanwhile, had not remained confined within the narrow limits set by M. Mesureur's trustful and somewhat academic imagination. Their educational and statistical functions soon became of minor importance. The functions of mutual insurance retained more reality—aiding the members to find employment, giving them relief when out of work or disabled by accident, and particularly providing the viaticum or traveling fund to enable the workers to seek a position elsewhere. Each exchange became the headquarters of an active campaign for unionizing the unorganized workers of the locality. But it was as a center of revolutionary propaganda that the labor exchanges developed most significance. Especially after the forming of the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail* in 1892, and with the growing influence of the Broussists and Allemanists in their ranks, they devoted themselves to spreading the gospel of the class struggle, the general strike, and abstention from parliamentary action.⁵

Finally, in 1895, the year when the Guesdist federation passed out of existence, there developed, largely under Blanquist inspiration, still a third organization, the *Confédération Générale du Travail*, or the C. G. T., as it has come to be familiarly known. Committed to much the same doctrinal and practical programme

⁴Fernand Pelloutier, *Histoire des bourses du travail*, p. 74.

⁵Pelloutier, *Revue politique et parlementaire*, XXI, 493.

as the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail*, the new organization found it difficult for some years to get a footing. It was only after 1900, when death had removed the leading spirit in the rival body, Fernand Pelloutier, that it elbowed a place in the sun. Finally, after many abortive attempts to amalgamate the two organizations, the Congress of Montpellier, in 1902, arranged the incorporation of the *Fédération* in the C. G. T. on favorable terms.

The *Confédération Générale du Travail*, which thus became the undisputed central organization of French unionism, consists of two autonomous sections. In each the unit is the local trade or industrial union. The battle between craft and industrial unionism, it may be mentioned incidentally, has resulted in France, so far at least as the federal organization is concerned, in the triumph of the latter type:

Since the Congress of Amiens, in October, 1906, while the trade federations at present existing have not been eliminated, only industrial federations are being admitted.⁶

Locally, the unions of all trades are grouped in the *bourses du travail*, or labor exchanges, and these organizations, again, unite to form the *Fédération des Bourses du Travail*, one of the main sections of the central body. The *bourses du travail* at present number 135 and comprise 2,500 unions. Their task, as has been noted above, is to provide mutual aid to the members and to serve as a center for propaganda. Of their success in the latter effort, M. Emile Pouget, associate secretary of the C. G. T. and one of the leading spirits in the movement, writes:

It is the activity of the *bourses* of the south which is responsible for the penetration of syndicalism among the agricultural workers and the formation of numerous unions of peasant vinegrowers; in central France it is the bourse of Bourges which has organized the wood cutters; in the west, it is the bourse at Brest which has stirred up Brittany, hitherto untouched by the labor movement. Again, when a strike breaks out, the *bourses* are the centers where the rebelling workers gather, and if some united action is being organized, manifesting the solidarity of the whole working-class of the country, . . . it is from them that the quickening summons radiates forth. What is more, they play an important part in

⁶ Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, Paris, 1908, p. 17.

the antimilitarism campaign; they keep open house for the soldiers, provide rest and comforts for them, and counteract the harmful influences of the barracks.⁷

Professionally, the unions are grouped in national federations, which, again, unite to form the second division of the C. G. T., the section of the Industrial and Trade Federations. There are at present over sixty federations included in the section, of which the building trades, printing, metal-working, textile and—a recent acquisition—the mining groups are the strongest. Exclusive of the miners' unions they comprise about 2,500 locals. In discussing the structure of these national federations, Pouget notes that while a few of the oldest are organized on a strongly centralized basis, the normal type is a federal union based on autonomous locals,

administered by a federal committee formed by one representative from each affiliated union. This representative, always subject to recall by his local, remains, by correspondence, in permanent contact with the organization which has given him his mandate. . . . The centralizations, which in other countries kills the workers' initiative and shackles the autonomy of the local union, is repugnant to the French working-class. And it is this spirit of autonomy and federalism—which will be the essential characteristics of the economic societies of the future—that gives to the French labor movement its profoundly revolutionary aspect.⁸

The federal union of these two sections forms the confederation itself. The administration is in the hands of three permanent commissions, a commission on strikes, a financial or auditing commission, and a commission in charge of the official journal, the *Voix du Peuple*, a general committee, and a modestly named "bureau," composed of seven members—two secretaries from the federation section, one from the bourse section, one from each of the three permanent commissions, and the treasurer. It is this bureau which really controls the situation, though professedly acting merely as the mouthpiece of the workers in the unions.

II

It is not, however, the structure of the C. G. T., but the spirit and doctrine which animate it, that best repay attention. The material for study is abundant. Syndicalism has been fortunate

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

in its expounders. Pelloutier, the most original and striking figure in the early days of the movement, and Pouget, Griffuelhes, Delesalle and Yvetot, among the present-day leaders, have all been men of ready pens. The most complete and systematic exposition of the movement on its theoretical side, however, is to be found in the writings of a group of bourgeois "intellectuals." This fact becomes significant in view of the emphatic and repeated insistence of the exponents of the theory that syndicalism is wholly a proletarian product, which has gradually and almost unconsciously taken shape as a result of the experience and needs and habits of thought of the workers themselves, differing herein from parliamentary socialism, which is permeated through and through with the ideals and dogmas of bourgeois "intellectuals." According to M. Pouget,

Syndicalism is not a deduction from some hypothetical system, . . . it is the result of an historical investigation into facts and of their clear-visioned interpretation. One might well call it the outcome and the crowning achievement of a whole century of struggle waged by the working class against the middle class.⁹

Pouget's brother secretary, M. Griffuelhes, maintains regarding syndicalism that

it has never been guided by formulas or theoretical propositions. Nor has it been the development of a policy which we had prepared beforehand. I cannot too strongly insist on the fact that it has consisted simply in a series of day-by-day efforts arising out of the events of yesterday . . . called forth by the environment and by the spirit which has taken possession of the working class.¹⁰

One of the intellectuals themselves bears nervously protesting witness to the same effect:

Revolutionary syndicalism is the peculiar and original creation of the French working-class; . . . if we have had a rôle, it has been simply the rôle of interpreters, translators, glossarists; we have served as spokesmen, nothing more.¹¹

As spokesmen, then, and nothing more, prominence attaches to the names of Georges Sorel, the subtle critic of Marxism, Hubert Lagardelle, the vigorous and clear-headed editor of *Le mouvement socialiste*, and Edouard Berth, one of his collabora-

⁹ Pouget, *Les bases du syndicalisme*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Griffuelhes, *L'action syndicaliste*, p. 8.

¹¹ Berth, *Le mouvement socialiste*, No. 198, p. 390.

tors, with Robert Michels in Germany and Arturo Labriola and Enrico Leone in Italy.

What syndicalism, as thus expounded, stands for, may be most clearly seen by noting the points which differentiate it from other movements more or less akin. It differs from pure and simple trade unionism in its revolutionary aim and its adherence to the class-struggle doctrine, from orthodox socialism in its distrust of political action and counter-emphasis on purely proletarian weapons and institutions, and from anarchism in its exclusively proletarian appeal and its stress on constructive measures.¹²

Syndicalism differs from trade unionism of the classic English type in aim, in method, and in spirit. Its aim is revolutionary. Nothing less than the complete overthrow of the capitalist system will content it. Partial ameliorations of the wage-earners' lot may be accepted, must in fact be demanded, but all the time with a clear consciousness that no concession which it is in the power of the capitalist to grant can meet their just and full demand. The interests of bourgeois and proletarian are irreconcilable and class war is the only possible issue. The leading Italian theorist of the movement writes as follows:

The only reality which we recognize is the existence of the class struggle, the only end that we put before our minds is to deepen and intensify that reality as much as possible. The tactics which we employ in the different countries are inspired by the necessity of intensifying the class struggle.¹³

In method, as will be noted later, the difference is equally vital. The syndicalist puts his trust not in well-filled war-chests, as the English unions have done of old, nor in the power of the ballot, as they are doing of late. It is part of his creed that a union fights best on a lean treasury, and fights best without the intervention of parliamentary representatives. The difference in spirit may be illustrated by a rather rhetorical passage in which M. Griffuelhes contrasts French and German unionism:

What characterizes the French workman is his audacity and independence. Nothing daunts him. He is above all authority, all respect, all

¹² Cf. Lagardelle, *Le mouvement socialiste*, No. 199, p. 426.

¹³ Arturo Labriola, *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, p. 17.

hierarchies. When a command is given by the powers that be, while the first instinct of the German workman is to obey, the first instinct of the French workman is to rebel. . . . And if one stops to consider what action involves, the superiority of French decisiveness and initiative over German prudence and sluggishness is manifest. Reflect too much and one never undertakes anything. One must go ahead, let himself be borne on by his own impetus, trusting only to himself, and reflecting that it is not for us to adapt ourselves to the law but for the law to adapt itself to our will. . . . The originality of French syndicalism lies in the fact that its only policy is action.¹⁴

Between syndicalism and socialism one would expect to find more harmony. Both profess to be based on the class struggle; both profess to be aiming at the same goal, the collective ownership of industry. Yet the syndicalists obstinately decline to accept either the leadership or the co-operation of the socialist party. It is a tantalizing situation; the hosts of the workers are marshaling under socialist banners and marching to a socialist goal, all as per programme, but they ungratefully refuse to accept the leaders predestined for their guidance or to follow in the paths thought out for their progress. Guesde planted and Jaurès watered, but Pouget and Griffuelhes reap the harvest.

The syndicalist critic, making his attack from the opposite quarter to that from which the revisionist fire is directed, charges that orthodox socialism is played out. As a doctrine, it has become either, as in France, merely a variant of the prevailing creed of solidarity, or, as in Germany, a meaningless and hair-splitting commentary on a few ambiguous odds and ends of phrases let fall by Marx. As a movement, it has become sluggish, colorless, correct, a bourgeois radicalism of a slightly more advanced type. The old fire has gone. Responsibility for this parlous condition is placed on its adherence to parliamentary tactics, its transformation into a political party.¹⁵

This transformation has been a steady, gradual process. A generation ago Jules Guesde declared that it was mere gullibility to expect emancipation from the participation of the proletariat in elections, that such action would inevitably turn to the profit

¹⁴ Griffuelhes, *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, p. 57.

¹⁵ Arturo Labriola, *Syndicalisme et socialisme*, p. 11.

of its enemy, the bourgeoisie.¹⁶ Then socialists began to enter parliament, not to control it, but "to speak from the windows" to the country, to use the parliamentary tribune as a pedestal for propaganda. The fatal virus of parliamentarism continued to work. At the Congress of Lille, latter-day church council, the acceptance of political action was set up as the test of orthodoxy and all the anarchism-tinged spirits who rejected this test were cast into the outer darkness of heresy. The motion ran as follows:

The parti ouvrier français considers as socialists none but those who, relying on the socialist group in the Chamber of Deputies, seek the abolition of the capitalist régime by means of the conquest of political power by the proletariat.¹⁷

Then came the Dreyfus case and the formation of the socialist-radical-republican bloc in defense of the republic, with M. Jaurès playing Père Joseph to M. Combes' Richelieu, and the entrance of Comrade Millerand into the Waldeck-Rousseau cabinet. The pace, it is true, was becoming too fast for some of the old war-horses, and this last development brought a split in the party ended only by Jaurès' repentance and the temporary restoration of the Guesde influence. But the faith in parliamentarism remained unquestioned; while right wing and left wing might differ on the minor question of tactics, piecemeal or complete capture of power, both agreed that the ballot was the socialist's best weapon.

While it was the entrance of Millerand into a bourgeois cabinet, sitting cheek by jowl with Gallifet, queller of the Commune, that first awakened widespread discontent among the militant spirits of the labor exchanges, distrust of ministerial participation soon developed into distrust of political action. The policy of penetration had made no change in the lot of the workers, had done nothing to develop and train their capacities and fit them for their part in the socialist commonwealth, had produced no alteration in the character of the state. And what was true of the fragmentary conquest of state power by a few

¹⁶ Cited in *Revue politique*, II, 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, X, 164.

socialists, the deduction ran was equally true of the complete conquest by the whole socialist party.

When Augustus had supped, it may be that Poland was drunk; but whether a few socialists become ministers or all the ministers are socialists, the working-men remain none the less working-men.¹⁸

Discontent soon voiced itself in action. Without attempting to follow all the battles and skirmishes between the adherents and the opponents of alliance between the socialist party and the syndicalist forces, it may suffice to quote the concluding clauses of the resolution of neutrality adopted by the C. G. T. at the Congress of Amiens in 1906 and resolutely adhered to since:

So far as the individual is concerned, the Congress affirms that the member of a union is entirely at liberty to participate, outside the union, in whatever movements correspond to his philosophical or political beliefs, limiting itself to ask in return that he should not introduce within the union the opinions he professes beyond its confines. So far as the organization is concerned, the Congress declares that, in order that syndicalism may attain its maximum effect, its economic action should be carried on directly against the employer, the federated organizations having, as labor organizations, nothing to do with parties and sects, which, outside its sphere, are entirely at liberty to seek the transformation of society.¹⁹

The refusal of syndicalism to ally itself with parliamentary socialism is based, negatively, on its belief in the essentially faulty position of the latter, and, positively, on its belief in its own self-sufficiency. The indictment it brings against the socialist party is that it is based on a misconception of the class struggle. Party struggle is not class struggle. The party is bound together by identity of opinion, the class by identity of interests. The party is an artificial grouping of men of all classes united by a temporary agreement; the class is an organic division of men subjected to the same economic influences, living and working on the same plane of material interest. This misconception has fatal results on the composition both of the rank and file and of the leaders of the party. The rank and file are recruited from every region of discontent; the party is committed to the defense of every doomed and decaying fraction of the petty bourgeoisie

¹⁸ Lagardelle, *Le mouvement socialiste*, No. 199, p. 429.

¹⁹ *Compte-rendu du XV^e congrès rational corporatif*, p. 171.

which is suffering from the onward and inevitable march of industrial progress; its action is clogged and hampered by the necessity of catering to the largest possible vote. The leaders more and more are drawn from the bourgeois "intellectuals," some led into the socialist ranks by honest conviction, some seeking the loaves and fishes, seats in parliament, or editorship of party organs—the camp-followers whom Marx denounced as "lawyers without clients, doctors without patients and without learning, students of billiards. . . ." Whatever their motive be, self-sacrificing or self-seeking, they are in either case hopelessly out of touch with proletarian thought and life. Fatal again, to the integrity of socialist doctrine, is the changed attitude toward the state which results from parliamentary action. Instead of becoming less and less the state becomes more and more; it is rashly hoped that a mere change in government *personnel* will suffice for redemption. The attempt is made to realize socialism in the framework of the existing state. And meantime the workers are assigned merely the passive rôle of casting a ballot once in four years. No attempt is made here and now to build up the economic institutions which are to control the society of the future, or to train the workers for the new and greater part they are to play.²⁰

It is, however, chiefly the positive belief of syndicalism in its own strength which is the barrier to alliance. Syndicalism is no more content to accept the socialist suggestion of syndicalist control of the economic struggle conjoined with socialist control of the political field than the mediaeval papacy was content to accept the Empire's compromise of papal supremacy in spiritual and imperial supremacy in secular affairs. For it believes that it can conquer single handed, itself achieve the revolution, itself build up the economic structures of the future. It is the heir of socialism, as well as of capitalism.

With anarchism, finally, the new movement has much in common, so much that socialist critics insist that syndicalism is only anarchism in disguise. It was, in truth, very largely the

²⁰ Cf. *Le parti socialiste et la Confédération Générale du Travail*; Berth, *Les nouveaux aspects du socialisme*; Sorel, *La décomposition du marxisme* (Bibliothèque du mouvement socialiste).

adoption by the anarchists of the policy of "burrowing" in the unions which led to the anti-socialist revolt. In their opposition to the state, to political action, to militarism, both movements seem at one. But, it is claimed by the exponents of syndicalism, the resemblances are only superficial, the differences fundamental. Anarchism is a survival of eighteenth-century individualism and sentimentalism, syndicalism a fore-runner of twentieth-century co-operation and scientific matter-of-factness. Anarchism makes its appeal to all humanity, syndicalism to the proletariat alone. Anarchism, reactionary at bottom, can see no good in capitalism or any of its works; syndicalism thanks it for preparing the material equipment and the spirit of co-operation essential for the society of the future. Anarchism makes the individual the unit, syndicalism the union. Even in their anti-militarism they wear their rue with a difference, anarchism actuated by humanitarian motives, syndicalism by opposition to the use of the army in suppressing industrial outbreaks. The new unionism cannot be identified with anarchism any more than with socialism.²¹

III

Syndicalism is not content with negative criticism; it has a positive constructive policy to offer. It adopts the old war-cry of the International, "The emancipation of the workers must be wrought by the workers themselves," and gives it new meaning. In every class struggle in the past, it is contended, the revolutionary class has created its own organs of emancipation. In the battle against feudal privilege the middle class conquered, not by penetrating and controlling the distinctively aristocratic institutions, but by creating new institutions, free towns and parliaments, and thus building up the framework of a new bourgeois society while demolishing the old feudal society. The proletariat has its distinctive institution ready to its hand—the union. It is the mission of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* to aid the workers in forging this new mechanism for its divers purposes, building up union, federation, labor exchange, each with its part to play in the society of the future. Marx

²¹ Cf. Berth, *op. cit.*, p. 32; Lagardelle, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

himself—whom syndicalists delight to quote against the Marxists—was the first to recognize that in the struggle for proletariat emancipation the union was to play the part played by the commune in the struggle for bourgeois emancipation.²²

The union, then, has a double part to play:

In the present [the official phrasing runs] an organization for collective resistance, in the future the unit of production and distribution, the basis of social reorganization.²³

Or as the organ of the movement phrases it:

The labor unions are coming to recognize more and more clearly the important part they have to take in the social structure. They know that besides defending their daily bread they have to make ready the future. They know that the labor organization is the matrix in which the world of tomorrow is being molded.²⁴

Details of the structure of the coming organization are prudently withheld by the major prophets, declining, in the classic phrase, to draw up kitchen recipes for the saucepans of the future society. Such forecasts as have been made, notably in response to a questionnaire sent out by the C. G. T. to its constituent members, reveal the extent to which utopianism survives in syndicalist thought.²⁵ Meeting "the day after the triumph of the general strike," the union of each trade is to decide what production is necessary to meet the community's needs, and make an equitable division of the work to be done, "taking into account the strength and capacity of each workman, and leaving him free to produce in accordance with the amount of energy which he can summon."²⁶ To the federation is allotted the task of equalizing production and distribution throughout the country, with the co-operation of the labor exchange, which will further assume what few of the functions of municipal bodies are to be preserved. The C. G. T. will have charge of international exchanges.

But what the precise division of functions in the future society

²² Cf. Lagardelle and Berth, *op cit.*; Sorel, *L'avenir socialiste des syndicats*.

²³ *Compte-rendu du XVe congrès national corporatif*, p. 171.

²⁴ *Voix du peuple*, No. 1, 1900.

²⁵ Cf. Sombart, *Sozialismus und der soziale Bewegung*, 6 Auflage, p. 137.

²⁶ Réponse de la chambre syndicale des ouvriers de l'ameublement de Brest, etc., cited in Kritsky, *L'évolution du syndicalisme en France*, p. 408.

will be matters little. What does matter is that the institutions of the future exist in embryo at present, and that here and now beginnings may be made in upbuilding the order that is to be. Syndicalism is at one with revisionism in this instalment attitude, however widely the means adopted differ in character. Action is not postponed till some distant cataclysmal instant. According to Pouget,

The revolution is a work of every moment, of today as well as of tomorrow: it is a continuous movement, a daily battle, without truce or respite, against the forces of oppression and exploitation.²⁷

There is none of the passivity of the fatalist belief in the all-sufficingness of economic evolution, none of the passivity of deputed action. Syndicalism, with its policy of direct action, demands all the courage and confidence and energy the workers can summon, and in turn trains them for the tasks they will have to assume in the future.

Gradually, then, the various labor organizations must take over whatever functions they can snatch from the employer and from the state, preparing for the day when they will supersede both entirely. Against the state direct action takes the form of "external pressure," by agitation and demonstration in force, as employed in the successful campaign in 1903-4 for the abolition of registry offices, and in 1906 for the passing of a weekly-day-of-rest law.²⁸ Against the employer the means adopted are novel not in themselves but in the revolutionary vigor with which they are applied. The strike, the main weapon, depends for its success not so much on strong strike funds, but on "the enthusiasm, the revolutionary spirit, the aggressive vigor" of the workers, who recognize the futility of competing with their employers on the pecuniary plane.²⁹ Characteristic are two customs which have marked recent French strikes: the "communist kitchen," where co-operative housekeeping is carried on, both for economy's sake and for the stimulus of contact, and the "children's exodus," the dramatic expedient of shipping to syndicalist

²⁷ Pouget, *Le parti du travail*, p. 14.

²⁸ Pouget, *La Confédération Générale du Travail*, p. 46.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

sympathizers in other cities, all the children of the strikers, thus putting the forces on a war basis.³⁰ The boycott, apparently legalized by the repeal of Article 416 of the Penal Code in 1884, and the label, are called into play, the latter expedient only to a minor degree. *Sabotage*, or *ca'canny*, is an expedient which has aroused more syndicalist enthusiasm and more bourgeois condemnation. This means, the use of which was formally recommended by the Congress of Toulouse, takes the form

sometimes of a slowing up in production, sometimes of bad workmanship; . . . in retail trade it takes the form of wasting the commodity sold, to the customer's benefit, or the contrary practice of rebuffing the customer to lead him to take his custom elsewhere. . . . The fear of *sabotage* is a precious sedative. . . . An example of its efficacy is afforded by the success of the employees of the Parisian hair-dressing establishments in winning a weekly rest day and shorter hours. It was by "whitewashing" the fronts of the shops with a caustic solution which injured the paint that this union won its better terms. In the space of three years, out of the two thousand shops in Paris there were scarcely one hundred which were not "whitewashed" at least once if not oftener.³¹

The most spectacular of syndicalist policies is the general strike. It is the climax of "direct action." There is something that fascinates the French workman's dramatic imagination in the picture of the sudden paralysis of industry from end to end of the state by the concerted strike of the whole working-force of the country. This policy, discussed sporadically in socialist and anarchist congresses since its first broaching at the Geneva Congress in 1866, put into practice of late years by the workmen of Belgium and Sweden and Russia to secure political reforms, condemned by many socialist authorities and given a hesitating and qualified adherence by others, has become the peculiar possession of French syndicalism. At first it took the idyllic form of

³⁰ H. Lagardelle, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, XXVI, 611, note.

³¹ Pouget, *op. cit.*, p. 41; cf. Jules Guesde: "The boycott, sabotage, partial strikes! These are the weapons, the sole weapons, with which you pretend to transform the institution of property and society! It is with these weapons you expect to make a thrifty conquest of the state, to spike the cannons trained upon you. . . . Is not this the height of ridiculousness? And yet you have not another weapon in your arsenal." Speech at Congress of Nancy, 1907, reported in *Le parti socialiste et la Confédération du Travail*, p. 40.

"the revolution with folded arms"—a mere picnic in the bois du Boulogne; but

in its later expressions it does not mean merely the cessation of work; it means the taking possession of the wealth of society . . . for the common good . . . by violent or peaceful means according to the resistance to be overcome.³²

It may be worth while quoting the official prophecy of its working:

The cessation of work, which would place the country in the rigor of death, would necessarily be of short duration; its terrible and incalculable consequences would force the government to capitulate at once. If it refused, the proletariat, in revolt from one end of France to the other, would be able to compel it, for the military forces, scattered and isolated over the whole territory, would be unable to act in concert and could not oppose the slightest resistance to the will of the workers, at last masters of the situation.³³

A necessary complement to the policy of the general strike is the anti-militarism propaganda. This opposition to militarism has its origin not so much in humanitarian longings for peace between nations, as in the fear of the use of the army in the partial strikes of today and the general strike of tomorrow. Bound up with it there is an attitude of hostility to the state—the doomed rival of syndicalist organizations—and scornful rejection of the ideals of patriotism.

An essential feature of the syndicalist creed is the hostility to majority rule. Syndicalism possesses the happy faculty of making virtues of its necessities. Faced with the fact that it is only a minority of a minority, including in its ranks, at most, 400,000 of the 850,000 union men in France, who in turn are only about 17 per cent. of the whole number of male workers, the C. G. T. proudly asserts the rights of the minority to rule. Democracy, with its majority-rule superstition, instals in power the reactionary and the sluggish, the inert and refractory masses. Syndicalism proclaims the right of the conscious and enlightened minority, stewards of the future, to represent the "human zeros" who have not yet awakened to their opportunities, whether they will or

³² Griffuelhes, *L'action syndicaliste*, p. 33.

³³ *Circulaire de comité de la grève générale*, April, 1898.

no.³⁴ A practical application of this doctrine is found in the refusal of the controlling spirits of the C. G. T. to give the larger and more conservative organizations represented the weight to which their numbers entitle them, petty federations with a few score of members counting for as much as great national unions with a score of thousands.

It is quite possible that in the years to come the C. G. T. will become more conservative in its creed and its actions. The government is doing all in its power to give more weight to the influence of the less radical elements in the organization. Socialist effort tends in the same direction. Jules Guesde excommunicates syndicalism with bell, book, and candle and attempts to break up the organization by forcing the withdrawal of the socialist unions of the north, while Jaurès, more politic, is willing to go with the syndicalists a mile that they may go with him twain, and seeks to keep on good terms with them in the hope of winning them back to the faith. But whatever the immediate outcome, the ideas of syndicalism, crude and visionary though they may be, will doubtless play a great part in the future development of labor thought and action.

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³⁴ Cf. Pouget, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26.